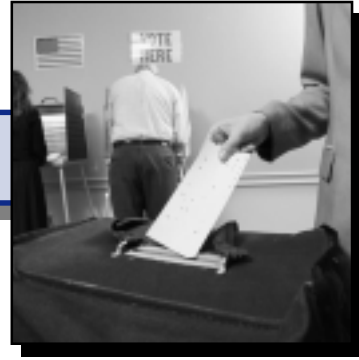


***Fact sheet:* PRIMARY ELECTIONS**



Representative John McCoy

38th Legislative District
December 2003

The Six Million Dollar *Ban*. That's what you might call the very brief special legislative session into which the governor called us earlier this month. We had a responsibility to get rid of next year's presidential primary that had been scheduled for Washington voters on March 2, 2004. It's estimated that banning this relatively meaningless "election" will save well over \$6 million.

Our state's presidential primary was started a couple elections ago as a way to get more citizens to vote (and to get more candidate-attention to Northwest issues). Unfortunately, it hasn't worked out that way. One newspaper editorial has derided this primary as an "ugly beauty contest." Here in the Evergreen State, in fact, the two major parties actually use their caucus meetings to pick most of their presidential-nominating delegates. And there isn't any drama as to the Republican nominee.

Different from 'blanket primary'

Don't confuse the presidential primary held every four years with the so-called blanket primary held every other September. In the latter election, citizens can vote for anyone they want — completely independent of party affiliation. The presidential primary obliges folks to select either a Democratic ballot, or a Republican ballot, or an unaffiliated ballot. Only candidates representing their respective parties are included on the first two ballots; each party's candidate is listed on the third ballot.

As you know, there's a chance that we'll lose our blanket primary, which is a tradition going back about 70 years. The blanket primary reflects our Washington history of political independence — and the aversion many citizens have to being saddled with a party label.

Some people in both major parties want to do away with the blanket primary, though, and oblige voters to choose a ballot from either the Democratic or the Republican party. That would eliminate the celebrated principle: "I vote for the person, not for the party." At least



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when it comes to the primary election in alternate Septembers, you would have to choose “your” party’s choice in deciding on your candidates for office.

As it stands now, state officials have joined forces with the Washington State Grange to keep our blanket primary on the books. A federal-court panel this past September declared the present system unconstitutional — and the full 9th Circuit Court of Appeals refused to consider the question. Right now, we’re waiting for word from the United States Supreme Court about our state’s appeal of that recent lower-court ruling.

Choice and privacy at stake?

A ccording to some folks representing the major political parties, the blanket primary tramples their ability to use the primary election to pick their own candidate to go on to the general election in November. “A voter shouldn’t be able to vote for a Democrat, or a Republican, or a Whatever in the primary election,” the big parties emphasize, “unless that voter identifies himself or herself as a Democrat, or a Republican, or a Whatever.”

But other people who want to keep the current blanket primary — some of whom are themselves long-time members of one of the parties — maintain that we mustn’t lose our tradition of choice and privacy in the voting booth. They say folks should be able to vote for whomever they want (and for whatever party they want) — and not have to tell anybody about it beforehand.

Look for this issue to take up a lot of discussion in the 2004 Legislative Session that starts Monday, January 12 — the second Monday in the first month of the new year.



For further information — and to share your comments:

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Please stop in and talk about the upcoming 2004 Legislative Session with

Washington State Representative

John McCoy



Town Halls



Tuesday, January 6, 2004

7 p.m.

Everett Public Library • Auditorium

2702 Hoyt Avenue

Thursday, January 8, 2004

7 p.m.

Marysville Public Library • Small meeting room

6120 Grove Street

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